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## ABI UMMÂNI

By A. H. PRUESSNER

Weltevreden, Java

In regard to the meaning of the title *abi ummâni*, or *abi zabê<sup>mes</sup>* there is still a great deal of uncertainty and divergency of opinion. M. Schorr in *Altbabylonische Rechtsurkunden* (1907), page 144, translates *Heerführer*, "army leader." In 1913 he had come to the conclusion that the bearers of these titles were police officials (*Urkunden des altbabylonischen Zivil- und Prozessrechts*, p. 446). Dr. Ungnad in 1914 translates *Heervater*, *Oberst*, and thinks that the term signified some high military officer (*Babylonische Briefe aus der Zeit der Hammurapi-Dynastie*). In every case, however, they express their opinion hesitatingly, and not without the cautioning question marks. For this reason the present writer deemed it not improper to state briefly the observations which he has made regarding this term, which may point to a more satisfactory solution of the problem.

There is no compelling necessity to conclude with Ungnad that we have to do with a military term. It is true that the ideogram *zabê<sup>mes</sup> = ummâni*, which latter term denotes a group of soldiers, an army. But it is equally true that the same ideogram is used very frequently in the contracts to specify a group of men of almost any description, like harvest-workers, day-laborers in building operations and canal digging, the crew of a ship, etc. In such a connection *abi ummâni* might just as well mean the elder, i.e., superintendent or overseer of such a group of workers. It is significant that in Ungnad's *Briefe* in the letters regarding the military organization (Nos. 35-41), the title does not appear, although one would almost expect to find it there if Ungnad's opinion were correct. Schorr's suggestion that these dignitaries may have been police officials seems more likely, especially if we take them more in the sense of administrative officers. In fact, there is at least one clear case in which a person so designated was the chief of an administrative department of the king's domain. The contracts enable us to follow the career of this gentleman, whose name was Utul-Ištar, and who finally attained to the dignity of an *abi ummâni*.

We meet him first in the twenty-sixth year of Ammi-ditana, when he, although being the responsible superintendent of a department of the palace administration, bears still the rather modest title of a *ṭupšarrum*, a scribe (*CT*, VIII<sup>36a</sup>). The contracts in which he figures are almost all promissory notes to pay to the palace the purchase price of wool taken from the department (*GAR-ŠU*, or *piḫat*) of Utul-Ištar, the scribe (*dub-sar*). Of course, he did not transact these sales in person; there was always a lower official or agent of the palace, through whom, or upon whose recommendation, the transaction was closed, and the buyer obtained the wool. For this reason, contracts of the palace usually contain a threefold statement in regard to the creditor. First comes the palace as the owner of the goods and chief creditor, then the department immediately concerned, and finally the name of the agent who transacted the sale. The latter was responsible to the chief of the department, and he in turn to the king.

From the twenty-sixth year of Ammi-ditana until the second year of Ammi-zaduga the title of Utul-Ištar is always stated as that of a *ṭupšarrum*, as may be seen from the following contracts:

- CT*, VIII<sup>36a</sup>, year 26 of Ammi-ditana.
- Waterman 19, year 29 of Ammi-ditana.
- CT*, VIII<sup>37c</sup>, year 29 of Ammi-ditana.
- Ranke 85, year 32 of Ammi-ditana.
- Ranke 87, year 36 of Ammi-ditana.
- Ranke 86, year 37 of Ammi-ditana.
- CT*, VI<sup>35c</sup>, year 2 of Ammi-zaduga.

The next two contracts which may be safely identified as belonging to his administration are dated some eleven years later, namely in the thirteenth year of Ammi-zaduga: *CT*, VIII<sup>21a</sup>, and Waterman 30. But now Utul-Ištar bears the more honorable title of *abi ummâni*. Another tablet,<sup>1</sup> dated in the tenth year of Ammi-zaduga contains the name of Utul-Ištar, the *abi ummâni*, as the creditor. He is not designated as the chief of an administrative department, and we cannot, therefore, identify him with absolute certainty with the above-named gentleman. Yet the circumstances seem to indicate that it is the same person. A merchant or agent receives 205 $\frac{2}{3}$  *ka* of oil, valued at 20 $\frac{2}{3}$  shekels of silver, to buy Gutium slaves.

<sup>1</sup> Meissner, *Beiträge zum altbabylonischen Privatrecht*, No. 4.

The trip is to last a month, and if at the end of that time he did not succeed in buying the slaves, he would have to refund the money. That we have to do with a transaction of the palace, rather than a private one, is evidenced by the fact that the merchant obtained the goods upon recommendation (*ana gabie*) of a certain Lu-Iškurra, who assumes in this way responsibility to Utul-Ištar, the *abi ummāni*. It is therefore not a wild guess if we identify this Utul-Ištar with the administrative official mentioned above. Thus in the year ten of Ammi-zaduga, or twenty-one years after we made our first acquaintance with him, he was in possession of the *abi ummāni* title.

He seems to have been able to supervise for at least ten more years, for he is probably mentioned in *CT*, VIII<sup>11c</sup> which reads as follows:

(1) *I biltam šipāti nam-ḥar-ti ekalli*; (2) *KI · LAM VI ma-na a-na I šikil kaspim*; (3) *šim X šikil kaspim*; (4) *GAR · SU u-tul-ilu ištār DUB · SAR*; (5) *itti ilu šamaš-šu-mu-un-dib DI · TAR*; (6) *mār ilu-šu-ib-ni*; (7) *milu-šu-ib-ni mār be-li-ḡa-tum*; (8) *ŠU · BA · AN · TI*; (9) *um<sup>um</sup> ši-si ekalli*; (10) *iš-ta-su-u*; (11) *kaspam a-na ekalli NI · LAL · E*.

One talent of wool, revenue of the palace, price one shekel of silver per six minas, total purchase price ten shekels of silver, of the department of Utul-Ištar, the scribe, from Šamaš-šumundib, the judge, the son of Ilušu-ibni, Ilušu-ibni, the son of Belijatum has borrowed.

On the day on which the call of the palace shall go forth he shall pay the silver to the palace.

We notice that the title of this Utul-Ištar is only that of a *ṭup-šarrum*, a clerk or scribe. There might be the possibility that we are dealing now with another man, who is starting his career at the bottom of the ladder. Yet there is reason to believe that it is still our old friend of thirty years' acquaintance. The reason for this belief is based largely on the personality of the lower official who is directly instrumental in closing the deal for the palace, Šamaš-šumundib, the judge, son of Ilušu-ibni. In our terminology we naturally conclude that the title of "judge" carries with it a higher dignity than that of a *ṭupšarrum*, a simple scribe; and we do not see why the judge should be subordinated to the clerk.

Moreover, we do not meet the judge here for the first time either. He too can be shown to have been in the employ of the palace, under his departmental chief, Utul-Ištar, for a period of nearly thirty years. His name is linked with that of Utul-Ištar in Waterman 19,

and *CT*, VI<sup>37c</sup> drawn up within a week of each other in the year 29 of Ammi-ditana, while the above-quoted tablet *CT*, VIII<sup>11c</sup> is the last in which we find him mentioned together with Utul-Ištar, that is, in the year 17+*e* of Ammi-zaduga. His identification is made easy, since in these three tablets, as also in a number of others, he is referred to as the son of Ilušu-ibni, the *akil tamkarim*. In the early tablets he himself is designated as *akil tamkarim*, clerk of the merchants or agents of the palace. He was their clerk, not in the sense of having to perform clerical work for them at their bidding, but rather of being the representative of the palace and taking care of its interest as against them. Later, though still performing these same functions, he bears the more honorable title of judge, which would tend to show that his position was by no means an unimportant one.

Since then, this man can be identified as having been connected with the palace in the department of Utul-Ištar from the year 29 of Ammi-ditana until the year 17+*c* of Ammi-zaduga, it will not be assuming too much also to identify the scribe Utul-Ištar with the same departmental chief mentioned in the earlier contracts. It is evident, then, that the designation of Utul-Ištar as *ṭupšarrum*, instead of *abi ummâni*, from the year 17+*c* of Ammi-zaduga is simply a slip of the scribe who drew up the tablet; the same way as a "Herr Geheimrat" might by mistake be simply addressed as "Herr Rat." The fact that such an error could occur would lead us to the opinion that the title *abi ummâni* was not so much the designation of a specific office, but rather a title of honor and respect. Utul-Ištar was in a high, responsible position as an administrative official of the palace while styled only a *ṭupšarrum*, and he continued to hold the same position and fulfil the same functions while called an *abi ummâni*. This title was really so little indicative of his particular office or official functions that a scribe in a thoughtless moment might still write *ṭupšarrum*, as we have it in *CT*, VIII<sup>11c</sup>. That a high military or police official (provided these special types of modern officialdom were represented in ancient Babylonia) may have likewise acquired the same honorary title is, of course, entirely possible. All that the writer hopes to have shown by these observations is that there is no compelling necessity for limiting ourselves to any of these categories in translating *abi ummâni*.